

# Chapter 6

## Housing, Politics, Human Rights

## Housing, Politics, Human rights

**Who was the "affluence" for?**

**By Reiko Masai, 40s, Kobe**

Kobe has long been administrating a developmental policy, which gives economic issues the highest priority. Dubbed "Kobe Corp," its urban management is well known nationwide. However, the Great Hanshin Earthquake revealed that the policy was not able to protect the lives and livelihoods of its citizens, Kobe has been trying very hard to achieve further development and affluence, but for whom?

This particular earthquake is also known to be caused by poor administration. For instance, most of the *bunka jutaku* wooden apartments were destroyed. Minorities, namely the elderly, disabled people, single mothers and their children, who had no other option but to live in the poor housing, became victims. If the local authorities had provided more support to ensure the safety of these homes, the number of fatalities would have been much lower. This city of 1.5 million people has only 65 municipal care takers. Some 2,000 volunteers became confused and helpless in the panic of the earthquake. The number of temporary residence or nursing homes for the elderly is one of the lowest in the country. More than 600 people died in the post-earthquake period, and deaths at temporary shelters continue to rise. In other words, some survived the disaster only to be lost later. Many of the elderly continue living in half-destroyed homes, which let in the rain, because the senior citizens are not financially able to take out loans to repair them. They have no other choice but to stay in these places even if their health deteriorates. The administration doesn't seem to give sufficient aid to the citizens when they need it most. Who is the administration for?

Before the earthquake, I had been lobbying for the construction of a women's center and had attended city council meetings as an observer. What I saw there was a sea of men. Only six women (presently eight) out of 72 counselors serve in the assembly. There are only female members and often none serving on the committees. Even the participants from the citizenry were all male. But half of the city population is female. More voices and views from women should reach the assembly in town planning. From now on, we should give priority to creating a society where each individual can reach affluence in the wider sense of the word.

There are several problems in everyday life that women can perceive but men cannot. Caring for the elderly is one of the major problems women face. A society where

women can live their lives to the fullest is where children, the aged and the disabled also thrive.

### **Regardless of the earthquake, women have no home in the three worlds**

**By Yuko Azumi, 40s, Akashi**

After suffering from the earthquake, |I moved to Hiroshima in the fall with absolutely no guarantees. It is now October, but I'm still out of a job. From time to time, I think about what I would be doing at this moment if the earthquake had never happened.

At 9 a.m. on January 17, 1995, all employees of my company were to gather at the office to take inventory. If the earthquake had hit at this time, I would definitely have died or been seriously injured. The office was located in Higashi-Nada Ward, an area where the highest number of death toll was reported. Our head office was burnt to the ground. My house stands near the shore and was very close to Awaji Island, the epicenter. Miraculously, I had only part of my house damaged because it stands a little off the fault line.

Water, electricity, and gas services were resumed relatively quickly, and |I didn't have to rely on my daughter or relatives for a long time. However, I couldn't go to work at all for the first two months because transportation was seriously disrupted. A lot of thoughts had come and gone through my mind and I became mentally unstable.

I am hyperactive right after the earthquake. Some days, I felt overwhelmed and shed tears for no particular reason while I was speaking on the telephone. After that, I was so depressed that I could absolutely not go to the devastated Kobe. When I had to run errands to Osaka, I would look down in the train to avoid the heartbreaking sight of burnt fields.

One day, I was so comforted by a person who had survived being buried under the debris for many hours. She had faced death. Remembering this most horrifying experience, she said to me, "The funny thing is, I felt so peaceful. I wasn't scared of death. I would like to think that all the people who died were feeling the same," Somehow, I felt so relieved listening to her.

I had begun writing this essay but had repeatedly asked myself if I really had the right to recount my story. Considering how little I suffered from the earthquake, I had almost given up writing. But by listening to her words, I was encouraged to write. She gave me the strength.

Above all, what I really wanted to write about was that women had never had real jobs or houses in the first place, regardless of earthquake.

In 1970, when I finished university, no positions were open for women expect for civil service or teaching jobs. Women's job qualifications were boldly printed in the classified ads those days as having "beautiful appearance" and "within commuting distance from parents' homes." Studio apartments for singles didn't exist, so a single woman could rent very few apartments. Even if I got lucky enough to find a place, the rent was never affordable for me because I had a low salary. My first home was a tiny room in a dormitory-like building. I had no bath, and I had to share a restroom with other residents.

I have moved more than 15 times so far – an average of twice every three years. Having lived in almost every kind of house, I can talk for hours about singles' life and hosing. Single women are not eligible to rent government subsidized apartments until the age of 50. As for the apartments built by Housing Corporation, which seem affordable, so many people apply that the chances of getting one are very slim. Women are not even eligible to apply for public housing unless they are married or living with their parents. This policy has not changed for 25 years.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake killed a lot of elderly women who lived in old, poorly-maintained *bunka jutaku* apartments. Living under this appalling condition even without earthquake damage, many women suffered, became sick and died alone. The old saying, women have no place to rest in the three worlds, remains to this day. Even if we have gone through such a disaster, we can manage to find food and clothes but not our houses. Although the quake evacuees received contributions of food, clothes and help from volunteers from all over the country, that meant little when they had no place to live. Clothes, food and living space are said to be the basic necessities for life, but I felt that living space is the most important of all. People cannot live forever in evacuation centers or concentration camp like temporary houses.

The same thing can be said about women's employment situations. It is almost impossible for women to get a full-time position if they have children even with some kind of certificate or license. There are often age limits on hiring. After my divorce, I had no choice but to continue working part-time for a long time. The earthquake didn't change this. I have never had any luck in finding a reasonable job through employment offices.

As an earthquake victim, I receive sympathy and generosity from people, as well as the administration. What I desperately want are a house in which I can live safely and a satisfying job that affords me a reasonable living after the rent is paid. I long for a society where all men and women can live happy lives with equal rights.

No home in the three worlds, and the elevator door closes.

## **Singles and housing problems**

**By I.Y., 40s, Amagasaki**

It has been 12 years since I started living on my own. I moved into my current apartment when I was 25. Looking back, I think it was relatively easier to move in. It seems that I saw more apartments of this kind or *bunka jutaku* back then, and 30,000 yen was about the average rent. I was a single 25-year-old office worker at that time. Although not rich, I was able to make a living, managing to pay 38,000 yen in rent every month.

My neighborhood has been gradually changing over the years. Three bathhouses near my home had disappeared, and condominium apartments or parking lots have been constructed. What does this really mean? The Great Hanshin Earthquake damaged half the house I have lived for 12 years, and I am also one of those being evicted by my landlord. I just don't know what to do, I am so tired. I am overwhelmed by a multitude of feelings: uneasiness, loneliness, and fear of leaving the house I have lived for such a long time. I also suffer from a sense of helplessness because I can't move even a single stick of furniture by myself. The earthquake made me think of so many things. The housing problem for single women raised a question, and that was the situation after women's retirement.

Due to the earthquake, I have to find a new place to live. The housing situation of today is completely different from that of 12 years ago. Now, rents are more than 60,000 yen anywhere. There is absolutely nothing I can afford, and I just stand helplessly in front of real estate agencies, not knowing what to do. The only way I have left is to fight against the landlord -- who demands my leave by May -- by depositing the rent in the government's escrow accounts. I'm more worried, though, every day about what would happen if my landlord were forced to tear down my house.

The housing problem for single people has just come up, and there is no solution in sight. All I can do is stand with my arms crossed in front of real estate agencies and wonder what I could do alone.

## **Isn't there peace for single mothers?**

**By K.N.,40s, Kobe**

After being rejected for residence in a home for mothers about 11 years ago, I was looking for an apartment for myself and my 10-year-old son. The welfare officers told me that it would be impossible for me to rent a place unless I had bruises from being abused by my husband. Actually, my husband had beaten me. I had been avoiding

violence but was rapidly becoming neurotic. The welfare officer coldheartedly told me that clever women who could think of ways to avoid violence were nothing but trouble and would not find a place to rent.

Many real estate agents had refused to even show me the apartments because landlords were usually reluctant to comply to fatherless families. The most humiliating experience I have ever had was to thank the agent more than enough who finally got me a lease.

Of all the quake victims who lost their homes, fatherless families were given preferential access to temporary housing, but the families eventually have to find other places to live. Wouldn't such a serious housing shortage push single-mother families out? Even before the earthquake, I had felt that this society was not kind to divorced women. Then, one of my friends, who also lives alone, pointed out that it didn't matter whether or not one was divorced and it was difficult for any woman to rent an apartment.

The real estate agents dealt with me rudely. Is it because I'm a woman? I'm not sure. If this is the case, it means that women can never relax, even after moving into an apartment. Doesn't this mean that women are forced to live in a society where it is difficult for them to acquire and maintain a home unless they are with men (husbands or fathers, not sons)?

### **The earthquake-exposed problems of single-mother families**

**By Michie Mukai, member of research center for modern family problems**

The Research Center for Modern Family Problems sponsors lectures and telephone counseling, providing information about divorce-related difficulties. It also runs a networking group called Hand-in-Hand Society. After the earthquake, it supported single-mother families by collecting contributions, providing a telephone counseling hotline and conducting a survey on the disaster. It has also been lobbying the government and demanding preferential support for single-mother families and other minorities.

Right after the disaster, we had difficulty contacting people in the devastated area by telephone, so we began our activities by contacting members of Hand-in-Hand Society by mail. We also contacted other similar organizations and groups. According to the group for single-mother families in Hyogo Prefecture, 10 buildings had been completely destroyed, but the group didn't know the detailed information. The group was unable to contact any district leaders. In Nishinomiya and Ashiya, the offices themselves became the center of disaster, and they are serving as emergency evacuation

centers. Furthermore, the prefectural group couldn't reach its Kobe branch. According to the Children's Welfare Department of Kobe Public Welfare Bureau, a dormitory for single-mother families in Kobe's Hyogo Ward had collapsed and five out of 37 people of 15 families died. No other welfare institutions had collapsed, but the staff was scrambling to transport necessary materials to repair buildings and other works.

Some members of Hand-in-Hand Society who live in Kobe told us that the only thing they could do during the earthquake was to hold and protect their children as everything crashed down around them. Others were pinned under furniture and had to be rescued by their children. Although many wanted to flee, they couldn't out of fear that things might fall on them in the street. Those who finally evacuated to safe areas in Kyoto, Osaka and Hyogo prefectures said that they would not have been able to escape from their houses without the aid of their male relatives.

In the case of fatherless families, many mothers couldn't go to the evacuation centers with their children even if they wanted to or make decision about what to do. The mothers themselves were in a state of shock. Mentally unstable, they were the ones who needed help.

Single-mother households are usually financially, emotionally and socially very unstable. The average number of members in a family is 2.8 persons. More than half of these mothers work on a full-time basis to support their children, but their average annual income is 2.54 million yen (the national average for single-mother households is 2.02 million yen). This is only 40 percent of the 6.43-million-yen average annual income for a regular family as of 1993. The percentage of single-mother families with their own houses is a low 26.2 percent. Most of the single mothers can't afford high rents and are often turned away by real estate agencies forcing them into older apartments.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake exposed a lot of problems in Japan's society. The most striking of these was how society's weakest members have to endure great suffering when a disaster occurs. The administration does support fatherless families by giving them preferential access to temporary housing and providing child care allowance, but this is far from sufficient.

Most of these women worked for small businesses. Due to the earthquake, many of these firms were forced to temporarily suspend operations or to downsize. Many female employees were laid off. Since daycare centers don't accept children unless both parents work, mothers find it difficult to search for employment and make a living. They usually don't have enough savings to rebuild their lives, and the high rents make it impossible for them to afford housing. They have no choice but to continue living in half-collapsed apartments and live in fear of aftershocks.

Some women who were separated from their husbands seriously considered seeking a divorce after their husbands failed to show any consideration for their children's safety. Due to the prejudiced attitudes toward divorce, many single mother families are isolated from their relatives or the local community. They must think of ways to repair their homes, find new jobs and raise their children without help. They face greater physical and emotional pressures than the average women, and their concern about the future grows ever stronger.

Even though the earthquake damage affected all types of families, single-mother families face greater hurdles in their lives. Further financial aid, psychological support and volunteer help will be required.

### **Results of the survey on the disaster (April 10, 1996)**

Survey period: March 1 – April 10, 1995 (Asked to answer the questionnaire printed in the March 1 Newsletter)

Respondents: 1,500 members of Hand-in-Hand Society (networking group for people having divorce-related problems, primarily women)

Number of questionnaires collected: 65 (all from women)

#### 1. Place of residence (21 people in Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo prefectures)

Prefectures	Households	Percentage
1 Hyogo	8	12.31
2 Tokyo	7	10.77
Osaka	7	10.77
4 Saitama	6	9.23
Kanagawa	6	9.23
Chiba	6	9.23
7 Hiroshima	3	4.62
Aichi	3	4.62
Nara	3	4.62
10 Gifu	2	3.08
Ishikawa	2	3.08
Kyoto	2	3.08

#### 2. Age

Age	Numbers	Percentage
25-29	3	4.62

30-34	21	32.31
35-39	17	26.15
40-44	6	9.23
45-49	7	10.77
50-54	8	12.31
55-59	2	3.08
60-64	1	1.54
65-	0	0.00
Total	65	100.00

### 3. Number of people in a family (Average number: 2.8 people)

Number of members	Households	Percentage
1	3	4.62
2	28	43.08
3	17	26.15
4	11	16.92
5	4	6.15
6	2	3.08
Total	65	100.00

### 4. Family structure

Structure	Number of families	Percentage
With children	41	63.08
With parents and children	16	24.62
With spouse and children	4	6.15
Alone	3	4.62

### 5. Occupation

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Self-employed	5	7.69
Company owner	0	0.00
Full-time	31	47.69
Temporary worker	8	12.31

Part-time	11	16.92
Helping self-employed	1	1.54
Freelance	3	4.62
Others	2	3.08
No employment	4	6.15
Unknown	0	0.00

6. Annual income (Average annual income: 279.88 million yen)

Annual income (million yen)	Number	Percentage
0	5	7.69
0-0.99	4	6.15
1-1.99	11	16.92
2-2.99	14	21.54
3-3.99	12	18.46
4-4.99	10	15.38
5-5.99	1	1.54
6-6.99	1	1.54
7-7.99	1	1.54
8-8.99	1	1.54
9-	0	0.00
Unknown	5	7.69

7. Savings (Average savings: 518.37 million yen)

Amount (million yen)	Number	Percentage
0	8	12.31
0-0.99	6	9.23
1-1.99	4	6.15
2-2.99	6	9.23
3-3.99	7	10.77
4-4.99	1	1.54
5-5.99	5	7.69
6-6.99	5	7.69
7-7.99	1	1.54
8-8.99	2	3.08

9-	6	9.23
Unknown	7	10.77

#### 8. Housing

Kind of housing	Number	Percentage
Ownership (house)	15	23.08
Ownership (apartment)	2	3.08
Rent (house)	5	7.69
Rent (apartment)	7	10.77
Company apartment	3	4.62
Shared	0	0.00
Apartment	11	16.92
Public housing	4	6.15
Parents' home/ home owned by parents	13	20.00
Others	5	7.69
Unknown	0	0.00

#### 9. People who they can rely on in case of disaster

I have someone	50	76.92 %
I don't have anyone	15	23.08

Relationship	Number	Percentage
Siblings	17	34
Others		
(ie: brother-in-law)	16	32
Father	15	30
Mother	12	24
Children	6	12
Other relatives	6	12

#### 10. Concerns about disaster

Kind	Number	Percentage
Housing	26	40.00
Job	12	18.46
Children	18	27.69

Relationship with others	0	0.00
Emotional uneasiness/ emotional damage	15	23.08
Health	17	26.15
Financial uneasiness/ financial damage	12	18.46
Divorce	0	0.00
Others	18	27.69
Unknown	3	4.62
None	2	3.08

### **Great earthquake and the disabled**

**By Shoko Nishiyama, 40s, Kobe**

I was just falling asleep. I felt my body sink and then fly into the air. It wasn't until dawn that I finally realized all of my furniture had moved because of the incredible tremor. The sky was dark, and people didn't seem to notice what had just happened. No one was making a sound. Flames were gradually spreading but I could hear no sirens. Tranquility made the situation even more eerie.

Three months have passed since then, and I still can't believe what happened. Right after the quake, the front door would not open and the elevators of the lifelines including water, gas and electricity were disrupted. I am severely disabled. In the middle of my fear that I might soon die, I kept asking myself why I was living on the third floor and not in a house specially built for people in wheelchairs. I am a member of a group to draw maps of wheelchair accessible locations. For more than a year, I had been lobbying for the construction of more public apartments with the first floor specially designed for wheelchair users and had submitted a request for this to be considered in town planning. I was strongly advocating that the government not ignore fact-finding surveys about the situation and urging the members to see the poor conditions for themselves. The earthquake hit just when I was involved in such activities. One wheelchair group member, Ms. Y, who is also severely disabled, lived on the 10th floor of a public apartment building. She almost starved to death before she was finally saved because she couldn't come downstairs by herself in the wheelchair. This particular case made a sensation in the media but it was far from an isolated incident.

This happened because Kobe has never truly spent money on behalf of its citizens; instead it wasted huge sums on the destruction of nature by leveling

mountains, cutting down trees, and reclaiming land. The city wanted to earn tourists' money. A resort? A trend? Kobe is renowned as a city of social welfare, but I believe this label to be utterly false. The reality is that Kobe is at the bottom in terms of social welfare. All of you so-called weaker of the society, don't be deceived by what the city says about welfare. We would like you to know that we, together with our colleagues and other volunteers, have been advocating to create a society which is friendly to all.

By the way, the reason why I survived the earthquake was because i had a partner to help me get moving. I left Kobe right after the quake, and when I came back a week later, I found a lot of memos stuck on my door. They read, "Please contact me if you are okay." I was extremely touched by people's warmth and especially by their recognition of disabled people like myself. I learned that people are truly kind to others, and at the same time, I was extremely glad that I had continued being active on behalf of the disabled community.

The following shows the request I submitted to the government. It is a request for what we believed was the very minimum requirement as of May.

## Request

May 1995

Submitted to: Kobe City Welfare and Education Division, Disabled Guidance  
Division, Welfare Planning Office

Shoko Nishiyama, Representative of the group for the creation of maps of  
wheelchair accessible locations

Thank you very much for the help provided to the disabled affected by the  
Great Hanshin Earthquake.

It has been two years since this group was established. We have been  
actively investigating areas in and about Nagata Ward with many disabled people  
and volunteers. We have contributed to the creation of a Shin-Nagata Station area  
map that aids wheelchair users. This map is also used by prefectural and  
municipal public institutions.

However, a great many buildings were damaged by the Great Hanshin  
Earthquake, and now it is expected that new buildings will be constructed in  
Hyogo Prefecture. We regret to say that Kobe has never been a place easy for the

disabled or the elderly to live in. We therefore, strongly urge the authorities to consider the following recommendations to improve the city.

At the same time, the public hopes for town planning that respects the human rights of each individual citizen. We consider this to be a good opportunity for the city to give top priority to welfare and to respect the true human rights of the disabled and the elderly.

## **Suggestions**

### Facilities:

#### 1) Trains

- \*set up elevators and slopes
- \*build wheelchair accessible restrooms
- \*eliminate steps or gaps between trains and platforms

#### 2) Buses

Buses are running as a substitute for suspended train services, but it is impossible for wheelchair users to make use of these buses because they are not equipped with lifts. We would like to ask the city to reconsider this situation and to advise the responsible departments to introduce buses with lifts.

#### 3) Private buildings

- \*Ensure that aisles permit wheelchair access

#### 4) Public facilities

Schools served as evacuation centers for this earthquake. But they didn't function as evacuation centers for the disabled because there are no elevators or slopes. We would like the city to recognize this and to install the following equipment at all public facilities to be constructed in the future.

- \*set up either elevators or slopes
- \*build wheelchair accessible restrooms
- \*ensure that aisles permit wheelchair access
- \*unify all Braille road tile colors (for the weak-sighted)
- \*set up guiding chimes at entrances and exits for the blind

We strongly hope that when considering town planning in the future, the government will create an opportunity to listen to the disabled community. We would also like to make sure that some of the disabled will be selected to serve as members on the committees discussing town development.

### **The disabled are always last: Cold reaction to voices crying for help**

**By Kazumi Sakamoto, 40s, Itami**

When everything shook, I intuitively thought that we could never escape in our condition. My husband and I both are physically disabled. One of us has had a leg amputation and wears a prosthetic leg, and the other has a paralyzed leg and wears equipment to stabilize it. In times of emergency, we can never run unless we put on this equipment. When the earthquake hit, the equipment had been thrown out of its regular place. It was already dawn when we could finally get ourselves to move. We were so helpless and the only thing we could do was to comfort ourselves by saying that everyone was scared. We couldn't move of our own accord. It was the first time for us to feel so frustrated and bitterly disappointed. We were worried about our friends, who are also disabled, and wanted to make sure that everyone was all right. We called the welfare officers so that they could go and help our friends if necessary. However, they told us that everyone was in trouble at the moment and that everyone was as frightened as we were. We only wanted them to look in on people who really needed help. We strongly wished for those city welfare centers equipped with facilities for the disabled to be opened to serve as evacuation centers for us. We were very disappointed when this didn't happen.

These are not problems of the physically disabled. What about those who have hearing difficulties? They cannot hear announcements for the water supply wagon just arriving at the elementary school. What about the blind? The interiors of the homes in which they are so used to living became entirely deformed because of the earthquake. What about those who take care of bedridden family members? Mothers with babies? Elderly women who cannot carry the heavy water jugs or the blue tarps to cover a leaking roof? Families with autistic children? Sick people? These are the people who really needed help, but they were neglected. Now welfare volunteers and officials believe that the disabled are just the same as everyone else. Why now?

Aiding the weak is not something that comes after all the other problems have been solved. Am I the only one who worries that the weak are the first to be cut out? I think that real generosity is to be considerate to the weak and to give them a helping

hand. I truly hope that the government has learned a very important lesson, and that it comes up with appropriate measures to deal with such emergencies. Providing a sense of security that's what welfare really means.

### **The Great Hanshin Earthquake for North Korean residents**

**By Li Oku Sun, 40s, Kobe**

We would have imagined that our Kobe would be hit by such an unprecedented earthquake? For the last 50 years of the postwar period, Japan has made great strides to be recognized as a great economic power. Like all cities in Japan, Kobe also took pride in its economic power. What has this economic power actually brought to the people? It is clear that even with great economic power the administration of Kobe could not establish a system to protect the lives or property of its citizens.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake hit at the end of a 50 year post-war era. It seems as if all victims suffered equally, but the powerless of our society suffered the most in this disaster. The powerless includes women who are constantly faced with the pressure of a male-dominated society based on the belief in women's inferiority to men. Others are the disabled and the elderly. The earthquake brought the discriminatory social structure into the devastated area.

Of course, North Korean residents, including myself, were also victims of this structure. Ever since the end of the World War II, the Japanese government has steadfastly maintained a discriminatory policy toward North Koreans living in Japan. This policy has never once been amended and has provided support for continued discrimination against Koreans in Japanese society. The Japanese government continues to make Koreans feel guilty about being Korean. This feeling was clearly visible in the relationship between Koreans and Japanese staying in the evacuation centers.

Our house was completely destroyed and so we sought temporary shelter at the elementary school gym. We felt relieved when we arrived at the aftermath of the 1923 Kanto Earthquake came into mind. Though it was completely against my strong desire to live under my Korean name as much as possible, I was so apprehensive that I registered under my Japanese name. Japanese society makes it difficult for Koreans to get by using their real names. The task of getting our real names back means establishing our identity as Koreans. Alternating between my Japanese and Korean names, I have gradually been making it clear to myself who I really am. Fortunately, the discrimination faced in this earthquake was nowhere near that of the Great Kanto Earthquake, yet I was angry with myself for using my Japanese names so readily.

When the original panic began to die down and people began to move toward reconstruction, a subtle difference in their attitudes started to appear. One incident happened when my husband resumed his work. He began working soon after the earthquake since his office had not been seriously damaged. Seeing that, one Japanese man told him that it was wrong that he as a Korean had a job when many Japanese had lost theirs. My husband was then told that he should offer his work to a Japanese national.

Another incident occurred when an aid worker distributed relief supplies in an obviously discriminatory manner. When we protested, he told us that he had absolutely no intention to listen to a Korean. There was also a Japanese man who had learned about contributions to Koreans living in Japan through the General Association of North Korean Residents in Japan (Chosoren) and the Korean Residents' Union of Japan (Mindan). He also argued that although Koreans complain about discrimination, they had received financial aid from Japan. He said that Japanese therefore had a right to some of the money provided by the Korean associations and that the failure to distribute the funds would amount to reverse discrimination. But I would like to ask, "When have we ever been treated the same as Japanese?"

Most people attempt to avoid all complications by pretending to know nothing about what is going on. They seem to believe that the situation has nothing to do with them. Although extremely sensitive to whatever directly affects them, they ignore everything else. Of course, stating one's opinion requires self-responsibility and action, and one must often act decisively. But most people become so reserved by refusing to show their feelings that they end up being unable to exchange constructive opinions. This causes tremendous damage in the end.

I would like to give one example. The Foreign Residents of Japan Reconstruction Center was established after the earthquake to aid foreigners living in Japan. It soon received several anonymous letters. One of these stated that foreigners had come to Japan of their own will and if they complained, they should return to their own countries. The writer also expressed his or her hatred for "dirty Chinese and Koreans." Another letter said that if there was enough money for Koreans, it should be spent for Japanese instead. The writers chose to hide behind anonymity, of course.

Koreans often advocate cohabitation with Japanese, but I wonder if we were able to co-exist in the confusion of the earthquake. Some people were successful in creating strong cooperative ties with Japanese they had known before the earthquake. Others said that the earthquake had made them realize how strong the bonds between them and their Japanese neighbors actually were. There were also some Japanese who

said they were encouraged by the strength and determination of Korean residents eager to begin the reconstruction process. So it is true that some ties between Koreans and Japanese became stronger than they had been in the past.

On the other hand, it is also true that certain exclusiveness against foreign residents was visible with both the administration and the citizenry. Nurturing a sense of international citizenship, which allows me to see the true nature of Japanese, I believe that the type of city where Koreans find it easy to live can also be comfortable for Japanese. In this sense, the problems faced by Koreans living in Japan are not only the problems of Koreans but also those of Japanese. I strongly hope that our shared experience in this earthquake will lead Japanese people to recognize and come to grips with these problems. I hope that the reconstruction process will affect not only the city but also the mindsets of its people. The reaction of a new international city is a challenge for Kobe.

### **Tent city**

**By Naori Morimoto, 20s, Kobe**

The tent city was located along a national highway that ran through a completely burnt area. It was built in a park adjacent to an immense dump for earthquake debris. The wide swath of blue tarps, which provided shelter, stood out in sharp contrast to the gray winter sky.

Like the Japanese, a great many immigrants from Vietnam also experienced the earthquake. A Vietnamese family of three who had barely escaped their burning apartment finally made their way to the park. They received no aid whatsoever for the first two weeks. When it rained, the family took shelter pressed shoulder to shoulder under a small picnic tarp.

Both the woman and her husband are in poor health and had been on welfare before the earthquake. Forced to live under such appalling conditions, they experienced severe emotional distress. Like many other evacuees, they suffered from chest pains, insomnia and nightmares. In mid-June, they finally began to construct a temporary house in the park from scraps of wood they had collected. Of course, they had to do it all by themselves.

As a fellow evacuee, I felt that the Vietnamese woman and I could talk together and share our feelings. By sharing my worries about having lost my job and comfortable way of life, I thought we would begin to have true communication. But perhaps concerned about her husband who was working so hard right next to her, she was somewhat distant during our conversation. When she showed me the house under

construction, her expression changed completely. It was as if she had finally found a light at the end of a long tunnel.

I had lost my job, and our lives without water and gas dragged on for three months. For two months during this period, I visited the tent city a dozen or so times. I noticed that Vietnamese people had become deeply skeptical of the administration and the media, and had even begun to strongly reject them. They refused to speak to me at first, saying that they were busy or they could not speak Japanese. I could understand why. They felt that they had been exploited by Japanese reporters who cared little about the family's plight but intended to file their stories. Although some people who had become aware of the situation through the media sent aid to the Vietnamese evacuees, this often led to obvious resentment among Japanese evacuees.

I feel that it is necessary to take time and find out what hidden problems the Vietnamese residents face.

### **What did the administration do for foreigners?**

**By Kazumi Moriki, 50s, Kobe**

#### 1. The evacuation of foreigners

The number of fatalities among foreigners resulting from the Great Hanshin Earthquake has reached 174 people from nine countries. According to Hyogo Prefectural Office as of April 14, 1995, there were 117 North and South Koreans, 44 Chinese, eight Brazilians, three Burmese, two Americans, two Filipinos, and one Algerian, one Australian and one Peruvian. As these numbers show, many foreigners were earthquake victims. I have heard that many wished to avoid the earthquake-prone Kanto area and chose to settle in the relatively quiet Hanshin area instead. A large number of foreigners -- North and South Koreans, Chinese, Indians and others -- have settled down and lived in Kobe for a long time. North and South Koreans managed synthetic material shoe factories in Nagata Ward, where people suffered the greatest devastation. Many refugees from Vietnam have also recently begun settling down in this area. In Higashi-Nada Ward, Brazilians and Peruvians of Japanese descent had lived with their families near the factories where they worked.

What happened to these foreigners after the evacuation? Because of the fires and the destruction of their homes, or fear of aftershocks, many of these people left the Hanshin area for other parts of Japan or even returned to their home countries. Some foreigners went to evacuation centers, and some students of Japanese language schools spent days in city hall before moving on to Osaka.

It was not easy for those who didn't have a good command of Japanese to stay at the evacuation centers because of lack of information or differences in culture and customs. After the earthquake, I visited all the evacuation centers to see if there were any foreigners. I found out that the only ones there were the permanent residents.

A Brazilian woman came to consult me about renewing her visa to stay in Japan. In the panic of the earthquake she left everything behind and escaped to Tokyo. She said she didn't realize that her visa had expired. A visa is an absolute must for foreigners. Without one, it is impossible to receive any of the relief funds contributed by various donors, to have medical expenses paid for injuries sustained in the earthquake, or to receive condolence money. These were not given unless the person had completed an alien registration. The number of foreigners who had overstayed their visas and turned themselves in to the immigration office -- which resulted in their deportation -- officially totaled 158. Most of these people received none of the relief funds donated by people from all over Japan and other parts of the world, despite the fact that they also suffered from the earthquake and lost their homes and jobs.

Seeing this, the Sisters from Nakayamate Church, volunteers, and North and South Korean residents of Osaka undertook a negotiation with the Japanese Red Cross. The negotiation made it possible for foreigners to receive relief money regardless of their visa status, but with some kind of a proof of residence in Japan.

The problem was that the central, prefectural and municipal governments didn't treat overstayers or short-term stayers as disaster victims since they are designated as non-residents. Despite the sweeping provisions of the Disaster Relief Law, the Japanese government applies national health insurance to cover medical expenses for earthquake injuries. Because foreigners were ineligible for the plan, they had to shoulder their own expenses. As far as foreigners paying into national insurance is concerned, the eligibility criteria should be reviewed. Apart from that, the closed nature of the administration should be criticized for resulting in the poor handling of aiding foreigners in time of disaster. In Hyogo Prefecture, the number of foreigners who canceled their alien registrations by returning to their own countries or transferring to other prefectures in Japan reached 722 people by April 15.

## 2. Foreign women

Amid the post-earthquake panic, the Kobe YWCA received a phone call for help from a Filipina woman Ms. S, who was married to a Japanese man. She called out of

uneasiness after the earthquake.

Ms. S's husband has been out of work since the end of 1994, and this disaster has made it even more difficult for him to find a job. She was pregnant and was due in a month. She had been to a clinic for a check-up only once. She didn't yet know which hospital to go to for her delivery. Her husband and mother-in-law had gone to their relatives' and hadn't been back for days. She didn't have much to eat. Upon hearing this, I visited her and provided money for a hospital visit. Since then, another Filipina woman Ms T and I began helping her. This is how our relationship started.

Ms. S had not suffered direct damage from the disaster, but there was neither water nor gas. In addition, because she was scared of aftershocks, she moved in with Ms. T for about a week. After that, however, she had nowhere else to go. What on earth had her husband been thinking? He left his wife all alone and didn't even take her to the hospital. She said that she was told by her mother-in-law not to go outside during the day because she should not be seen by the neighbors. Her husband's family opposed their marriage and their having a child. She has never met her sister-in-law. She had to decide in which hospital to have her baby and join the national health insurance because she had no other insurance. I tried to get help from the municipal child delivery assistance plan because she could not put together the necessary funds. Unfortunately, her income from the previous year placed her above the ceiling for help from the plan.

It is not that she suffered directly from earthquake damages, but she became a victims of Japanese people's prejudice and the closed nature of Japanese society. She could not even turn to her neighbors for help. In Nagata Ward, there were post-earthquake rumors that foreigners were assaulting women, but this was completely false. There were a surprisingly large number of cases where foreigners were isolated from the community even when they were married to Japanese. Under such circumstances, foreign women are always put into weaker positions.

Ms. T, who is also married to Japanese, was able to evacuate to her sister's home in Tokyo right after the earthquake. After things calmed down, she returned to Kobe and started relief activities with Japanese people. There was another Filipina woman from Osaka who had brought aid to her friends since the quake hit. Foreigners who could get in touch with one another collected information this way, and they were able to receive help. Ms. T and her friends participated in a FM mini-program called Yumen, which had been started by Vietnamese people. They were able to provide information in Tagalog for Filipinos. Ms. T lost a close Filipino

friend in the quake.

The harm suffered by foreign women has been greater than I had expected. Of the 174 foreigners who died in the earthquake, a disproportionate 102 were women. One of the reasons why the death toll for foreign residents was large lies in the concentration of the foreign population. We should not forget that the poor relationship between Japanese and foreigners has led foreigners to face worse situation than Japanese in the catastrophe. If we do nothing, the women who stay at home will become even more isolated. Just like Ms. S.

### **The type of city we wish to live in: Toward reconstruction**

**By Chie Kawasaki, 20s, Kyoto**

I would like to report on the forum sponsored by Women's Net Kobe.

#### 1. "From the architect's perspective" by Akiko Ito

In Moriminami of Kobe's Higashi-Nada Ward, where I live, 90 percent of the homes collapsed and 78 died in the destruction. The city has begun drafting new town plans and the Moriminami area was included in the readjustment district. The city's plan turned out to be so neglectful of the ideas or opinions of the residents. Housewives carried out a petition campaign opposing the plan. They collected some 2,080 signatures in five days.

In the end, the town planning bill was adopted by the assembly on March 14. The residents began working on an alternative plan to be represented as a supplementary bill. That led to a citizen's town planning campaign gaining support from the city council. The local organization conducted a survey and submitted the result to the municipal administration. At the same time, the pre-earthquake condition of the town and the would-be obstacles to reconstruction were observed and included in a basic outline of the town. It was also submitted to the municipal government. Town planning is best achieved with residents' opinions, but many had left the area and there was no place for residents to gather for discussions. We are currently showing residents videos of specific models of the town so they can have a basic idea of the new town.

#### 2. "From the standpoint of medical treatment and welfare" by Yuiko Mori

As a member of medical treatment collective union, I have been studying the nature of health. Through this research, I concluded that the natural environment deeply affects our state of mind. After the earthquake, those left behind were the

weak, such as the elderly or children. These people should be given priority in medical treatment but the reality is far from this ideal. Part of the medical expenses could be exempted, provided that the people had not even reached the evacuees in the temporary shelters.

Despite the fact that plenty of possibilities are open to the administration, it has chosen to ignore the citizens' views. The lack of communication between the administration and citizens makes it impossible for the government to hear the suggestions and requests of the people.

### 3. "My experience of the earthquake disaster" by Noriko Kawamura

At the moment, my family is living in a tent in Motomachi Park in Hyogo Ward, Kobe. Evacuees like us who were unable to secure a place in evacuation centers have no choice but to live in the tent village. The temperature inside the tent reaches almost 40 degrees Celsius during the day and dips to 18 at night. There are elderly people sleeping all day in such places. We asked the city to provide lamps inside the tents, and a single 40-watt light bulb was finally installed in each tent a half month later.

In an attempt to improve their living conditions, some evacuees over emails called for more secure shelters in the park. The evacuees slowly began to build shelters in the park. I feel frustrated at these overly patient people for not letting the government know how angry they were. A wide gap exists between the city government's reconstruction plan and the necessary improvement of the shelters for the quake victims. What bothers me is that the administration never tries to listen to what the evacuees really want. The government's welfare policy is worthless, and that was evident in the way the office handled temporary housing. Some people who had not even submitted applications for temporary housing were notified that they had won the housing lottery. On the other hand, some lottery winners had their allocation canceled when they simply complained that it was too far.

Many residents of Hyogo Ward live near their workplaces. With severe damages to their stores, they are undergoing difficulties reopening their businesses. What they need are start-up funds, but the government has been meticulously inspecting each loan application and needlessly requesting guarantors to the loans.

First houses, then living expenses. These two things are urgently needed.

Patrol workers are sent by the prefectural government every day, but they change every three days. It is annoying to have to explain what is going on in the camp all over again for every new patrol officer. Why do the authorities like the

mayor or department chief not visit the sites directly? I think the intention of Kobe is to reconstruct the city for tourism as soon as possible and it wants to forget about the earthquake. The administration never wants to face reality. Judging from its policies, I think the government obviously lacks the will to work together with residents to solve existing problems

**From the participants:**

**Ms. N:** What I discovered from this earthquake is that the Kobe of our dreams was only an illusion. No funds had been set aside for emergencies, and current social welfare policies were complete failure. Shelter is an absolute necessity in life. What the city is doing right now is simply repairing the damages without much soul-searching. It is reconstructing without a deep understanding of the painful sacrifice of 5,500 deaths.

**My impression:**

This forum opened with about 35 participants, including myself. I am from another prefecture. Speeches by the participants and panelists expressed a variety of thoughts, leaving me at a loss of what to say. Japan's distorted, dysfunctional nature of the social system was revealed by the disaster, as well as by the evacuees, and earthquake victims. Even these who were not affected by the earthquake must not be satisfied with the current situation. I am truly glad to have participated in this forum because I was able to share the pain and frustration of others, even if only to a small extent.

**The women's grass-roots election campaign was worthwhile**

**By Reiko Masai, 40s, Kobe**

When I first heard that the Kobe mayor was promoting airport construction in the city soon after the earthquake, I could not believe my ears. I wanted to ask him just what he was thinking at a time like this. This anger triggered me to run for a municipal election. It was not long after I and some women had created a volunteer group to provide services in the quake-stricken area.

A network for women's affairs called, Women's Net Kobe, was established in 1992. I have been holding workshops and other activities for the network. I have long been aware that voices of residents, especially those of women, are not heard in municipal politics. It is absolutely impossible for women to be heard by a government when the assembly only has six female out of 72.

I was nervous and quite worried for the first 10 days after the official announcement of my candidacy. It was a long procedure to register ourselves as a political party.

Finally, only one month before the election was officially announced, I was able to start my campaign activities on May 1.

"Put an end to the administration that gives precedent to development over its citizens. We need more women in the decision-making process to promote the citizens' views in reconstruction."

I put up handmade banners and began making campaign speeches with a megaphone in front of apartment complexes. My female friends were surprised to find out that it was their friend and not her husband running for office. Most of my male friends, on the other hand, advised me to give up my candidacy because no organization would back me up and it was impossible for me to win.

I also hosted small afternoon teas, which served as campaign meetings. I continued to appeal that our everyday life would never change unless politics changed and it is we who change politics. We needed the government to hear the voices of citizens and of women, not only those of political parties and large organizations. I received support from not only members of Women's Net Kobe but also by my friends from the community choir and cooking classes, and from the women of my neighborhood. My friends from the choir sang me a song, "Give me an office," which is a take-off of a famous song. I was grateful for all of them and their strong support, especially when half of them had their homes partly or completely destroyed in the earthquake.

I borrowed a campaign car from a city council in Sakai, Osaka, and megaphones from another council in Amagasaki. We made t-shirts with my caricature and sold them at 600 yen for three. Wearing one of those t-shirts and an orange baseball hat, I went around town to meet residents. In markets, our campaign group resembled the Japanese folktale "Momotaro (Peach Boy)" -- the children's story about a boy who was born from a peach and goes to fight the demons on an island with a monkey, a pheasant and a dog. Going around shaking hands with people I met, I felt as if I were in the theater troupe.

We had no regular campaign staff. People assisted us whenever they were available. My campaign was based on part-time homemakers. From distributing flyers, putting up posters and announcing my name from a campaign car, to making campaign speeches around town, everything was new to us. After the election, one person said to me that it was as though she were the one who had run for election. Another said that it reminded her that women were able to run for office. Yet another said she was able to

feel that politics was very close to her. In any case, it was an election, in which women worked very hard and supported one another. Some people, though, said it was a cultural festival for middle-aged women.

My camp vigorously stated, "No more useless parties" and "Don't mess with us, thinking that we are only housewives." Sometimes, we had the opposition camps applauding our aggressive statements like these. My supporters were so energetic and enthusiastic that even those who had said they were going to support me from backstage were actually holding microphones in the end.

Even more surprisingly, several members of the government who support citizens' rights came to support me from all over the country. They also expressed that the reconstruction of earthquake-afflicted Kobe was a concern of Japan as a whole and that citizens' power should be visible in Kobe.

Members of women's groups in Saitama Prefecture and Nagoya, whom I had come to know through the disaster, also came to support me. Many times I felt my heart filling with warmth. I realized activities to send more women to the Diet are promoted as a nationwide network. In the beginning, I was aiming for an election, in which even women could be involved, but it turned out to be one that worked thanks to women.

I think that the true nature of an election was questioned in this particular one because it was held after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, an unprecedented disaster. Yet most of the candidates campaigned in a quite orthodox way, and I was disappointed that they didn't even try to clarify their policies with the voters. As a citizen of the quake-afflicted area, I still wonder why they made no effort to change their traditional campaigns system. The experience of running for office made me strongly aware that voters are longing for lawmakers to clearly state their views and policies.

On the election, I received 3,507 votes and unfortunately ended up in second place. Yet, during those nine days I had an exhilarating experience. Even though we had neither the money nor an organization, I am firmly convinced that our campaigning was never in vain. I would very much like to make full use of what we gained through the election and the ties formed amongst the people involved. I also hope to actively participate in politics from now on. I would like to be a part of the city moving toward reconstruction. Our activities have just begun.